PREVIOUSLY...

When **GREG WILLIS,** the teenaged super hero **GRAVITY,** investigated a gigantic high-tech artifact that suddenly appeared in the middle of Central Park, he found himself teleported to a starship, hundreds of light-years from home.

He awakened to discover that a bizarre collection of super-powered beings were also transported to the ship against their will: the amazing **SPIDER-MAN;** former Avengers the **WASP, HENRY PYM** and **FIREBIRD;** second-generation super-villain turned movie producer **KRAVEN THE HUNTER;** the queen of the hidden society known as the Inhumans, **MEDUSA;** the latest incarnation of the man/alien symbiote combination that calls itself **VENOM;** and **THE HOOD,** a small-time crook recently gifted with big-time powers.

As they rapidly approached the artificial planet called **BATTLEWORLD,** the godlike being known only as **THE BEYONDER** appeared, promising his captives that if they kill their enemies, in return he would grant them, "all you desire." Venom immediately accepted the offer, attacking his archenemy Spider-Man and running him through the chest with his tail, killing him instantly.

Now Medusa stands ready to avenge the wall-crawler's horrific death...

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EASY, HOOD. PUT YOUR GUNS AWAY.
DUNNO, WASP. GUY NEEDS KILLING. BULLETS ARE CHEAP AND PLENTIFUL.
THAT'S NOT OUR CALL. WE'RE TAKING HIM BACK HOME WITH US AND TURNING HIM OVER TO THE AUTHORITIES.
YOU'VE GOT TO BE KIDDING ME!
STAND ASIDE.
CALM DOWN, MEDUSA.
VENGEANCE ISN'T OUR WAY.
AS THE ROYAL CONSORT OF THE SOVEREIGN NATION OF ATTILAN, I CLAIM CIVIL AUTHORITY OVER THIS MURDERER--
NOT GOING TO FLY. I'M USING MY AVENGERS' SECURITY CLEARANCE AND PUTTING HIM IN PROTECTIVE CUSTODY--
--CIVIL AUTHORITY OVER THIS MURDERER. AND UNDER THE TRUE LAW AS DULY ESTABLISHED IN THE SCROLLS OF AGON...

...I SENTENCE HIM TO FIFTY LASHES.
KRAK
AHHHHHH!
KRAK
UNNNH!
WHOA! WAIT!
KRAK
AIIEE!
THE GOOD NEWS? ONLY FORTY-SEVEN TO GO.

KRAK
SHOULD WE LET HER DO THIS?
IT FEELS WRONG. BUT I DON'T KNOW IF WE COULD STOP HER IF WE WANTED TO.
SPIDER-MAN WAS MY FRIEND. VENOM'S GOT THIS COMING AND PLENTY MORE.
NO. WE CAN'T LET THIS CONTINUE.
KRAK
HE'S EXTREMELY VULNERABLE TO SONIC ATTACKS.
SO?
SO, AT THE MOMENT OF IMPACT, HER HAIR IS TRAVELING FASTER THAN MACH 2. BAD ENOUGH.
KRAK
...BUT THE LOOP TRAVELING WITHIN HER HAIR IS DELIVERING A SONIC BOOM DIRECTLY INTO HIS BODY.
KRAK
AHHHHH!
YOU HAVE TO STOP. YOU'RE KILLING HIM.
THE LAW IS CLEAR ON THIS POINT. IF HE'S TOO WEAK TO SURVIVE HIS PUNISHMENT, SO BE--
AHHHH!

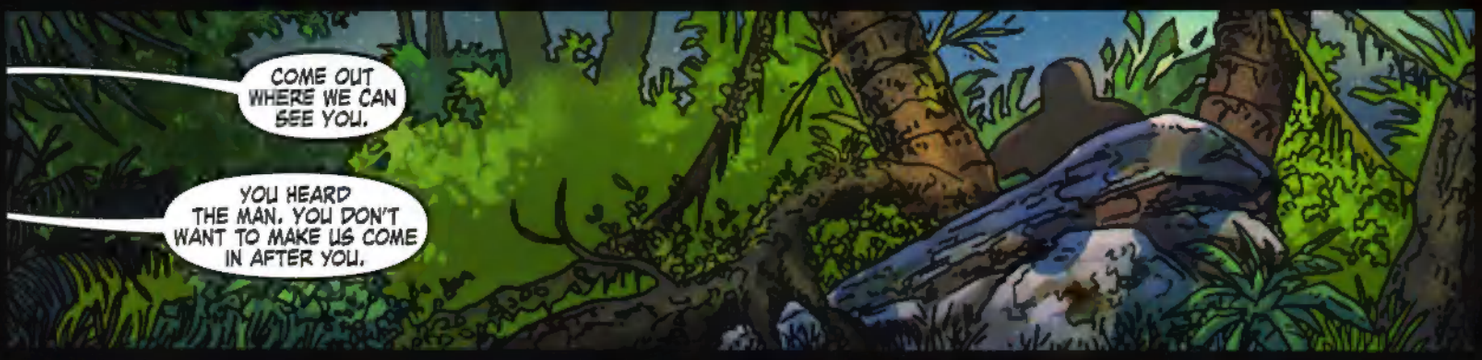
SON OF A...!
BLAMBLAMBLAMBLAMBLAM
GET HIM!
ZAPP ZAPP
SHRAK
KRUNNK
HE'S TUNNELING STRAIGHT AHEAD.

AND DESTROYING EVERYTHING IN HIS PATH. WE NEED TO FIND HIM BEFORE HE DESTROYS A CRITICAL SYSTEM.
UH, DR. PYM? I THINK HE ALREADY *HAS.*
WHAT IS IT?
THIS SHIP. HOWEVER IT WORKS, I'VE NEVER FELT IT MOVING.
IT'S AN INERTIALESS DRIVE.
MAYBE IT *WAS.* ALL OF A SUDDEN, I CAN FEEL US ACCELERATING.
THE ENGINES ARE DAMAGED.

EVERY-BODY GET OUT HERE!
WHAT'S GOING ON?
ASSUME CRASH POSITIONS!
I CAN CONTROL GRAVITY. MAYBE I CAN SLOW US DOW--
NNNNGGH!
WHAT'S WRONG?
FOR ONE THING, WE'RE SPEEDING UP!
YOUR POWERS ARE INTERFERING WITH THE PROPULSION SYSTEM. YOU'RE FEEDING THE ENGINES.
I...CAN'T...STOP...IT...

WHERE'D THAT COME FROM?
MY POCKET. I KEEP A LOT OF EQUIPMENT SHRUNKEN DOWN UNTIL I NEED IT.
I SUBMIT MYSELF TO THE SAME PROCESS BUT THERE ARE CERTAIN BIOLOGICAL DIFFICULTIES--
SAY NO MORE.
SHRINKAGE IS NOTHING TO JOKE ABOUT.
HEART AND RESPIRATION ARE FINE BUT THERE'S MAJOR DAMAGE TO HER LEG.
SHE'S LOST A GOOD BIT OF BLOOD, TOO. I'M GIVING HER SOME PAINKILLERS.
NOW THAT YOU MENTION IT, I'VE GOT A TERRIBLE BACKACHE. GOT ANY OXYCONTIN IN YOUR MAGIC BAG?
GO AWAY.

AW, MAN. THE KID...
ARE YOU CRAZY? YOU COULD HAVE DIED IN THERE.
HE DID DIE IN THERE. HE DESERVES OUR RESPECT.
WE SHOULD FIND SOMETHING TO WRAP THE BODY IN...
HOLD UP.
WE'RE BEING WATCHED.


COME OUT WHERE WE CAN SEE YOU.
YOU HEARD THE MAN. YOU DON'T WANT TO MAKE US COME IN AFTER YOU.

I GET IT, YOU'RE ALL VERY TOUGH. SO DON'T HURT ME, OKAY?
WHO ARE YOU? WHAT ARE YOU DOING HERE?

MY NAME'S MICHAEL. I GOT HERE THE SAME WAY YOU DID.
WELL, ALMOST. MY GROUP MANAGED TO GET HERE WITHOUT CRASHING THE SHIP.
CAN I PUT MY HANDS DOWN WITHOUT GETTING SHOT?

FOR NOW.
IF YOU KNOW WHAT'S GOING ON HERE, I'D LIKE TO HEAR ABOUT IT.
IT'S PRETTY MUCH WHAT YOU'VE ALREADY HEARD. THE BEYONDER...

UHNN...
ARE THEY OKAY?
SHE'S INJURED, BUT SHE'LL BE FINE. SPIDER-MAN DIDN'T MAKE IT.

MYSTERY-MAN'S RIGHT.
THAT JUNGLE'S FULL OF PREDATORS.
THEY'RE WORKING UP THEIR NERVE.
OKAY, THEN. WE'LL TRY IT YOUR WAY.
AT LEAST WE DON'T HAVE TO WALK.
WHAT
TRANSPORTATION.
TONY STARK LET YOU HAVE A QUINJET?
ACTUALLY, HE LOANED IT TO ME. I FORGOT I HAD IT.
UH-HUH.
DON'T FLY, IT ATTRACTS TROUBLE.
TROUBLE'S MY MIDDLE NAME.
OKAY, I DON'T EVEN HAVE A MIDDLE NAME, BUT IF I DID, WOULDN'T "TROUBLE" BE COOL?

LAST CHANCE.
YOU'RE MAKING A BIG MISTAKE.
...."ALOYSHA TROUBLE KRAVINOFF," ALMOST MAKES UP FOR "ALOYSHA."
WE'LL COME BACK FOR YOU.
DEETDEET DEETDEET
PROXIMITY ALERT! WHERE...?
IT'S DRAGON MAN! IT'S--
FOOSH
WHOOM

TWO CRASHES IN ONE DAY? MAYBE WE SHOULD HAVE JUST WALKED.
GET TO GROUND, HE'S TURNING FOR ANOTHER ATTACK.
ARRRRRH!
THOK
SKREEEEE
AHH!
UNF!
WHUDD
UH!

REGROUP! TRY AND LEAD HIM AWAY FROM OUR INJURED.
GRAVITY, RIGHT FLANK. MEDUSA, LEFT.
NNNN... NNNNN...
NHHHAAAAGH!
OH... UNH. OHHH!
GET AWAY FROM HERE, MAN! THAT THING'LL KILL YOU.
DON'T... THINK SO... NNNNAGH!
DID I SAY I'VE SEEN SOME FREAKY #$*% THIS YEAR?

MARVEL HEROES HOTSPOT

Mark Gruenwald 1953-1996 – Patron Saint of Marveldom

TOM SEZ

On August 12, 1996, ten years ago this month, Mark Gruenwald passed from this Earth. It was a shocking thing to hear for those of us who were around in the Marvel Bullpen at that point, in that Mark was a health nut and seemed in excellent physical condition. But an undiscovered congenital heart problem combined with extraordinary levels of stress wrote a premature end to his life and career.

Some reading this may remember Mark as a writer, the guy who wrote more issues of CAPTAIN AMERICA than anybody else, the guy who invented D.P.7 and guided the destiny of QUASAR, the guy who was the first to try to extrapolate the effects of super heroes on the real world in SQUADRON SUPREME. Others may recall Mark as a top-notch editor on such titles as AVENGERS, THOR and IRON MAN, one who ran a regular column in those books (and later MARVEL AGE) called "Mark's Remarks" which gave readers insight into the workings of the funny book business. And while this is all true, the Mark Gruenwald I want to talk about is the man behind the curtain.

If you were reading Marvel comics in the 60s and 70s, you were aware of the Marvel Bullpen that Stan Lee wrote about on the Bullpen Bulletins page and in the letters pages: a magical place where the best and the brightest within the four-color community toiled endlessly but contentedly, crafting the best comic books on Earth. But as time passed, and more and more behind-the-scenes information came out, it became apparent that this was a fantasy, a fictional construction. Things weren't quite so idyllic in the magical Bullpen, and the artists and writers had the same discontent as any other workers in any other job. It was all make-believe.

Except for Mark Gruenwald.

Mark was what you wanted Marvel to be like when you came to work there. Mark lived his life in the spirit of those ideals, because Mark loved comic books. Upon realizing at a young age that he'd never be able to become a super hero himself, he instead dedicated his life to telling stories of heroic fantasy. And he was the living embodiment of the Marvel Bullpen as Stan Lee envisioned it.

In trying to find a way to communicate Mark's spirit to the uninitiated, the closest analogous person I could come up with is Jim Henson. Like Henson, Mark lived life with a childlike gleam in his eyes, and with a philosophy that looked for the best in people, and delighted in making them laugh and feel good. He was a genuinely good person, one of the very few I've ever met. Even before he became Executive Editor, Mark was the de facto morale officer for Marvel, hosting insane, improbable parties in the Bullpen for every holiday, and masterminding stunts like M-day, in which practically the entire staff crowded into Mark's offices wearing Michelle Marsh masks, so Mark could film the event and send the footage to the local CBS affiliate where she worked. It was an act that Mark took on the road as the ringleader of several years of convention antics, where, rather than staid slideshows about what was coming up in next month's comics, Mark would create living board games and offbeat game shows, entertaining the crowd and making them all feel like they were a part of the Marvel lifestyle. As Mark's wife put it, Mark was silly about that which was serious, and serious about that which was silly.

His organized mind drove him to explore the structure of the fictional Marvel Universe in the form of such projects as the OFFICIAL HANDBOOK TO THE MARVEL UNIVERSE, in which he and a team of experts attempted to quantify and reference virtually every aspect of our fictional reality. This was an even more massive task in the days before computers, when every line of text had to be set by hand. Mark and his assistants such as Mike Carlin and Elliot Brown used to spend entire weekends locked away within the Marvel offices, pulling each issue together and pasting it up to be ready for print. The irony was that Mark was mainly a DC fan, having grown up on the early super hero efforts of editor Julie Schwartz. He had the chance, near the end, to work for DC, his former assistant Carlin having become their Executive Editor, but he turned the job down. Despite the dark times Marvel was going through, with massive layoffs due to "downsizing", he felt a responsibility to those around him and the work he had taken on. If he departed, there'd be no one left to look after the characters and the people who meant so much to him.

"Someday the universe will tire of me and will break me down into the components I came from. Right now I'd mind if that happened, but when the time comes I imagine I will welcome no longer being separate from the rest of reality."

--Mark Gruenwald

I was not especially close to Mark. Were you to have asked him to name his friends, I wouldn't have shown up in the top fifty. And I knew him for fewer years than he's now been gone. But he had a profound influence on my life and the way I conduct my career, just as he did for almost anyone whose path he crossed. And I'm very much aware every day that, in many ways, I'm sitting in his chair, as the caretaker of the mainstream Marvel Universe, the overseer of the Marvel Handbooks, and now the guy who writes columns for his own Bullpen page. It was a strange sort of milestone when I realized that I had now edited more issues of AVENGERS than he had.

Mark was not perfect. He was sometimes too analytical, and his sensitive nature made him perhaps the wrong person to be in a position of authority when it came time to let people go. I know he carried the weight of those firings all the rest of his days. He could waffle at times, not wanting to choose one person over another when conflicts cropped up between them. But he made his life what he wanted it to be, and seemingly enjoyed every moment of it. You'd be hard-pressed to find anybody with anything bad to say about Mark. His was a rare and singular vision. More than any other individual, Mark Gruenwald represented the fiction of Marvel, making it a reality even when the fact was a hard and cruel place.

Tom B

ON SALE AUGUST 2006

ANNIHILATION #1: Nova and crew make their final stand against Annihilus--and this is only the first issue!

BEYOND #2: With one of their number already dead, the heroes crash onto the Battleworld!

CAPTAIN AMERICA #21: Cap and the Winter Soldier side-by-side!

CIVIL WAR #4: A death! A betrayal! And a team reborn!

CIVIL WAR: FRONT LINE #5: Wonder Man is drafted!

CIVIL WAR: FRONT LINE #6: Speedball goes on trial!

CIVIL WAR: YOUNG AVENGERS & RUNAWAYS #2: What lurks within the Cube?

FANTASTIC FOUR #540: A CIVIL WAR tie-in. Four no more!

FANTASTIC FOUR: FIRST FAMILY #6: The FF's final confrontation with their first archenemy!

IRON MAN #11: Under attack by his teammates, Iron Man must work to save himself!

JACK KIRBY'S GALACTIC BOUNTY HUNTERS #2: In order to save his son, Mainframe must reunite the Galactic Bounty Hunters!

MARVEL TEAM-UP #23: As Freedom Ring convalesces, the New Avengers fight the Iron Maniac!

MS. MARVEL #6: A CIVIL WAR tie-in. Ms. Marvel, hero-hunter!

MYTHOS: HULK #1: Hulk's origin retold in all its gamma-irradiated, painted glory.

NEW AVENGERS #23: A CIVIL WAR tie-in. Things go south for double-agent Spider-Woman.

SHE-HULK #11: The honeymoon is over for She-Hulk!

THUNDERBOLTS #105: A CIVIL WAR tie-in. Zemo takes on Captain America!

X-FACTOR #10: What is Madrox's secret? Who betrays X-Factor?

FIVE FUN FACTOIDS FROM AUBREY SITTERSON

Editor of MARVEL TEAM-UP

1. I'm a Nintendo DS Fanatic--I take on all comers in Mario Kart, and my Animal Crossing town is like heaven.
2. My love for ECW wrestling is only a little ironic. Rob Van Dam will always be my champion.
3. I prefer Namor's green trunks over the black vest--it's like wearing a jean jacket in the pool.
4. Aubrey is NOT a girl's name.
5. There's a giant peacock tattoo on my back--don't ask...

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MARK E-MAIL "OKAY TO PRINT"